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FM AMEMBASSY PARAMARIBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8315
INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO 1024
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 1540
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 1424
RUEHSJ/AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE 0437
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARAMARIBO 000280

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR LLUFTIG
DEPT FOR OCS/ACS/WHA - RBRANSON
DEPT FOR WHA/PD APRUITT, GADAMS, EDETTTER
DEPT FOR PA/PRS
USAID FOR DCHA/OFDA
SAN JOSE FOR USAID/OFDA TIM CALLAGHAN
PLEASE PASS FOR PEACE CORPS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [NS](#)

SUBJECT: SITUATION UPDATE 3: FLOODING IN SURINAME'S
INTERIOR

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REFTELS: PARAMARIBO 277 AND PREVIOUS

11. (U) Heavy flooding is continuing to have severe effects on Suriname's interior. (See reftels). Good news is that water levels are falling in the upper Suriname River region (which saw the greatest initial damage), however, levels are starting to rise in eastern and southern Suriname, especially along the Lawa, Sipalawini, and Tapanahony Rivers. According to metrological reports, more rain is expected in the region over the weekend, which if sustained could worsen the situation in both areas. According to estimates from the National Coordinating Commission for Disaster Planning (NCCR), 8,000 square kilometers of the Uppper Suriname River area and 15-16,000 square kilometers of Tapanahony/Lawa River area are under water. There are reports that Amerindian populations in the affected areas in the south are fleeing to Brazil and those in the east are fleeing to French Guiana in search of food.

12. (U) Airlifts of relief supplies, including food, water, medicines, and emergency supplies began in earnest on April 11. Eight flights delivered supplies to interior consolidation sites, for onward distribution to remote areas by boat. Airlifts via airplane remain difficult, however, because many airfields are still submerged. The GOS has emphasized the need for helicopters as the only means to get in and out of these areas. However, the lack of refueling capabilities in the interior and long distances to cover will complicate the equation. Transport of goods beyond airlifts remains an issue, as dirt roads leading into the interior are barely passable. The NCCR continues to work with the Red Cross, military, police, and local NGO's to deliver assistance.

13. (U) President Ronald Venetiaan announced in a May 11 National Assembly session that the disaster relief operation, dubbed "Fala Watra," will cost at least 25 million USD (70 million Surinamese dollars), of which less

than 3.6 million (10 million Surinamese dollars) has been received or made available for the operation. The Minister of Finance just established an Emergency Fund to finance the relief efforts to which the Council of Ministers allocated one million dollars on May 11. The Government of the Netherlands has pledged one million euros that will be donated through the UNDP, which continues to coordinate donor country efforts. Brazil is sending 13.5 tons of food and 1.5 tons of medicine on a military transport plane scheduled to arrive on May 15. The Brazilian Ministry of Defense is considering a GOS request for helicopters. President Hugo Chavez offered to send helicopters with fuel to Suriname in a letter to President Venetiaan, who will likely accept the offer.

14. (U) Local business and parastatals donated 850,000 USD, and Dutch organizations and municipalities continue to raise money. A nationwide telethon in the Netherlands is planned for May 14. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Marie Levens, who now works at the Organization of American States (OAS), is spearheading a drive to collect donations from Surinamers living in the United States.

15. (U) A three-person USAID/OFDA disaster assessment team is scheduled to arrive in country on May 12. OFDA will work with a UN disaster assessment team, the leader of which is already in country, as well as a European Union team set to also arrive on May 12.

16. (U) Immediate priority needs are food, water, shelter, transport, fuel, medicine, and technical assistance. With the vast majority of the affected areas' subsistence farming plots underwater and food storage facilities destroyed, food shortages in the immediate and medium term are serious concerns. Outbreak of diseases and illnesses related to poor sanitation and a predicted spike in the mosquito population also are worrying health officials.

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17. (U) COMMENT: The GOS has been reasonably organized and coordinated under the circumstances, but has had trouble delivering material assistance immediately to a remote population due to poor transportation infrastructure and shortage of physical assets. This has sparked criticism of the government for not doing enough, and has the largest opposition party, the NDP, attempting to bypass the NCCR by distributing aid directly through their own channels. Their ability to overcome logistic barriers better than the GOS however is questionable.

LEONARD